Volume IV.
Number 4.

Week of
February 22, 1943

New York

THEATRE CRITICS'

Reviews

1943

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†"For Your Pleasure" opened Friday, February 5th, at the Mansfield Theatre.
†"The Moon Vine" opened Thursday, February 11th, at the Morosco Theatre.
†"This Rock" opened Thursday, February 18th, at the Longacre Theatre.

THEATRE CRITICS' REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Theater Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN	NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK POST	NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE	NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"	NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

Place this week's reviews with preceding weekly reviews so as to have always an up to date file of the New York Stage.

Published by

CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS 235 East 22nd Street, New York, N. Y.

Yearly Subscription
$15.00

"This Rock"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
February 19, 1943

Billie Burke Heads Cast in Play About British Slum Children During Blitz

By JOHN ANDERSON

BILLIE BURKE returned to the Broadway stage last night after playing hookey and other things for a dozen years in Hollywood, and she seemed almost as buoyant as ever in a comedy called "This Rock" presented in the Longacre by Eddie Dowling. Since the play itself is nearly as buoyant as a ton of iron her relation to the proceedings is about that of a fisherman's cork float anchored to a lead sinker. She bobs up and down a good deal and never gets anywhere.

This seems especially unfortunate in view of the play's authorship. As the product of a big oil man it ought at least, to float. But Walter Livingston Faust's enthusiasm for the drama obviously exceeds his talent. His intentions are honorable and his sentiments amiable but his little picture of England during the blitz has about it a coy and cloying quality we might expect if Pollyanna had written "War and Peace."

Slum Children

It is Mr. Faust's pleasure, if not ours, to examine the results of moving 20 children from the bomb-wracked slums of London to the great Stanley estate on the River Tyne. Father Stanley is a shipbuilder, his wife a charming flitterbrain, their daughter a sub-moron whose conversation sounds as if it had been spelled out in toasted marshmallows.

To the ancestral halls comes the band of East End tatterdemalions, led by a bitter youth acutely conscious of the English class distinctions. You can see at once that he and Miss Stanley will fall in love at the drop of an "h."

Well, the children stay there and bring life to the stuffy Stanleys. Daughter rushes off and joins the nurse corps, the servants slowly drift into the armed services, and finally the dear old gardener goes to do his bit with appropriately flowered remarks upon the general situation.

"Ah, Mum," he says, when a bomb rips up the garden, "'Twas one of the oldest gardens in all England, but it doesn't matter. Flowers can be replanted. But if it had hit the house 'twould have taken flowers only God could replant."

Mercy on us.

Faces Washed

As the play goes on and the children have their faces washed, their clothes replaced, and their talk polished slightly it is clear that Mr. Faust thinks this is all a very ennobling experience for them. He also thinks it is good for the Stanleys, and that Democracy works both ways. Suddenly the bitter young man from the slums is speaking prettily, and without bitterness. When he tries to protect the Stanleys from some new evacuees billeted on them, he even seems a bit of a snob, too. He isn't bitter any more, and since, at that third act moment God is in His heaven, Mr. Faust fixes it for him to marry the Stanley daughter. You just know that England is going to be a better place to live in, if not the theatre.

Comedy Touches

Though Mr. Faust uses the class struggle in his plot he pats it gently and gets it to sit up and bark politely for a happy ending. You don't need your sugar-ration card at the Longacre's syrup-works.

Mr. Dowling has given all this stuff the care and patience he might put on a first-rate play. Miss Burke twinkles around as the giddy Mrs. Stanley, as light as ever in he comedy touches, gaily attractive, and as ever charming. She comes as near as anyone can to making bricks without straw in comic stage business since her frantic efforts to peel potatoes do more for the occasion than all the carefully idiotic talk. As a clever comedienne she knows the accents even when the words aren't there.

Nicholas Joy does his urbane best to humanize some of the class-room dialogue of the great English shipbuilder, and Zachary Scott tries expertly to escape the cliches of the writing as the bitter young man. The play swarms with children, and Master Alastair Kyle is outstanding among them as a pleasant and intelligent eight year old.

It is not his fault that he seems more adult than the play.

'THIS ROCK'

Play in three acts by Walter Livingston Faust. Billie Burke starred; staging by Eddie Dowling; setting by Watson Barratt. Presented by Mr. Dowling at the Longacre Theater February 18, 1943. The cast:

Children ..Suzzanne Johnson, Lois Volkman, Joyce Van Patten, Buddy Millard, Dickie Millard and Harlan Stone
Dannie ..... Walter Kelly
Mary ..... Joan Patsy Flicker
Joannie ..... Joan Shepard
Douglas MacMasters ..... Zachary Scott
Johnny MacMasters ..... Alastair Kyle
Patton ..... Roland Hogue
Margaret Stanley ..... Jane Sterling
Cecily Stanley ..... Billie Burke
Malcolm Stanley ..... Nicholas Joy
Robert Duncan ..... Everett Ripley
Maid ..... Lucia Victor
Cuthie ..... Ethel Morrison
Angus ..... Malcolm Dunn
Mr. Higgins ..... John Farrell
Mr. Harley ..... Gene Lyons
Mrs. Proudie ..... Mabel Taylor
Mr. Proudie ..... Victor Beecroft
Little Daisy ..... Lorna Lynn
Little 'Arry ..... Gerald Matthews

NEW YORK POST
February 19, 1943

"This Rock," a Claws-Conscious Comedy About the British at War

By WILELLA WALDORF

EDDIE DOWLING put an added strain on the delicate balance of our international relations last night by producing an embarrassingly bad play about England entitled "This Rock" at the Longacre Theatre.

The author, Walter Livingston Faust, has been identified as a vice-president of the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company who enjoys writing plays in his spare time.

He is fearfully bucked at the way those claws-conscious Britishers have let down the social barrriers, and all that sort of thing, since the bally Boches started dropping bombs in some of England's stateliest gardens, forcing Milady herself to wrestle with hordes of brats from the East End of London who smell badly and make rude noises in the drawing room. Frightful, eh what? Oh, rather!

Even the Butler Unbends, Slightly

In three short but interminable acts, Mr. Faust shows us what jolly good sports the wealthy Stanleys turn out to be when the offspring of the lower orders, in need of disinfectants and a bawth, descend upon them. Cockney accents sharpened for the fray.

What ho, what ho! In almost no time at all the little dears creep into the hearts of the entire household, including Old Cuthie and Angus, the philosophical gardener. Patton, the butler, never does quite unbend, of course, but just before the final curtain he comes in for a brief moment in shirt sleeves, indicating the triumph of Democracy in its most virulent form.

It is probably unnecessary to add that there is a stiffish claws-conscious love story involving the daughter of the Stanleys—heiress to the Stanley shipyard fortune—and a bitter young fellow from the East End who grouses around the RAF as a greaser for a spell, before he rises majestically to sergeant, and finally to lieutenant. As the lieutenancy comes, his Cockney accent goes. Wonderful educator, the RAF.

The Return of Billie Burke

"This Rock," sadly enough, is apparently supposed to be a vehicle for Billie Burke, returning to Broadway after an absence of a dozen years. Miss Burke has the role of Mrs. Stanley, who is just the giddiest creature imaginable, my dears. How she dotes on those cute Cockney brats after they have been properly deloused and dressed up like little ladies and gentlemen.

She won't have the government taking them away from her when the bombs begin to fall too near. Silly old government! Doesn't it know she just dotes on cooking for them all, despite the fact that the foolish cook-books don't seem to help one teensey-weensey bit?

Miss Burke wrestles with this debilitating role in a series of gowns designed by Valentina, who knows just what the British wartime matron should wear on every occasion.

With much simpering, cooing, gurgling and hand-waving, she does manage to raise a laugh here and there. When one of the little boys' pants split, for instance, she pins them together with a diamond brooch. And as we recall it now, the entire second act consisted of a potato peeling binge in which she did everything but toss the peelings into the chandelier. Quite a lot of the time, in fact, Miss Burke is almost as distressing as the play.

Nicholas Joy Quotes Sir Walter Scott

Nicholas Joy is his old imperturbable self as the ship-building magnate who is just too Democratic for words, old boy, old boy. Alastair Kyle is a chipper little fellow as the most beguiling of the transplanted brats, and Jane Sterling and Zachary Scott are saddled with the love interest.

Most of the people are pure caricature of the slap-stick variety, and are played accordingly. Along toward the end, when we thought we couldn't stand anything more, several of the characters began to spout poetry.

It fell to Mr. Joy to enunciate the lines from which the title comes: "This rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I."

In case there are no Quiz Kids in your family, it comes from "The Lady of the Lake." Bartlett says so.

One of those very, very friendly first-night audiences was on hand at the Longacre last night, so no rocks actually flew. That doesn't necessarily mean they won't at subsequent performances, however. Come on, mates, give 'er the good old rawsberry!

"This Rock"

NEW YORK TIMES
February 19, 1943

Billie Burke Comes Back to Stage, After Absence of Twelve Years, in 'This Rock,' at the Longacre

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BY DAY, Walter Livingston Faust is an executive downtown, but his heart is in the right place, which is the theatre. While good intentions count, even on Broadway, it seemed last evening at the Longacre that Mr. Faust is not yet the most facile of the Times Square playwrights. For his "This Rock" has the air of having been written in purple ink, and Eddie Dowling, who directed, has done one of his less-successful jobs at putting it on the stage. To be frank about it, there are certain moments of the play which sound a good deal like a parody, when wooden figures wander about the stage expressing overwritten thoughts.

Mr. Faust undoubtedly has an idea, for it has occurred to him to wonder what would happen to the children, as well as their elders, when they are evacuated from London's East End to manor homes in the country. So far so good, but Mr. Faust's children are the dirtiest of all possible East End children, and his county people are the stuffiest of all possible manor folk. When they begin talking about classes it grows a bit hard to accept, and the play ends with no solution to the problem—except the brother of one of the children wins the girl of the house, which sociologists, if not playwrights, probably would not regard as a universal solution.

* * *

After an absence of a dozen years, Billie Burke has returned to the stage to play the leading role. She still has the vague, flighty gestures of old, mannerisms that will be remembered from happier occasions when the script did not so bother her. Playing the part of one of the children is Alastair Kyle, who is excellent as that combination of angel and devil, a boy. Jane Sterling and Zachary Scott are the young people, and it is their misfortune to be tortured with some of Mr. Faust's less happy writing. Usually Mr. Dowling can be counted on as a good director but this time he has permitted a butler to come in and out in the manner of Mr. Soglow's Little King and other players to act out types as though they were caricatures. Watson Barratt designed the setting.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 19, 1943

East End Kids

By HOWARD BARNES

AFTER a dozen years of celluloid capers, it is good to see Billie Burke fluttering through dim-wit scenes and malaprops on the stage again. She does it with considerable comic effect in "This Rock," which Eddie Dowling has brought to the Longacre. She has lost none of her knack of taking an audience into camp. She does it in this stage offering with almost no benefit of smart playwriting or direction. Even when she is on stage, which is often the case, "This Rock" is a sorry show.

* * *

Walter Livingston Faust, who is a dramatist by avocation, has conceived a tolerable notion for farcical fooling in his work. He has dumped a bunch of London's East End brats in an elegant English country home during the blitz and observed the resultant pandemonium. Unfortunately, he has not known what to do with that simple situation. His plotting is so crudely articulated that the action is forever going off at loose ends. His attempts to tie off his theme with high-sounding speeches about social consciousness and a changing world are so banal that they are likely to make you shudder.

* * *

Class warfare, in the Faust conception, is something that deserves no other term than ridiculous. It involves a bitter young working man in a romance with the daughter of a wealthy ship builder. It involves several unfortunate players in genuinely distressing exhibitions. Where the author has gleaned his social philosophy is something of a mystery. It certainly looks awfully silly in dramatic terms. Occasionally there is a bright line, but on the whole "This Rock" has little to recommend it as a play.

* * *

To Miss Burke's great credit, she moves serenely through the proceedings as though they really added up to an entertainment. As the startled matron who finds her palatial home overrun with evacuated tough youngsters and an embattled aviator, she distills a lot more humor from the three acts than is there in the script. On one occasion she pulls off a bit in which she takes a fling at cooking with sheer and hilarious improvisation. Nicholas Joy backs her up solidly, as the shipping magnate; Zachary Scott and Jane Sterling do what they can with an extremely cut and dried romance and Alastair Kyle, among the dozen or so child actors, contributes an appealing characterization. The staging of Dowling, though, is unaccountably fumbling. Probably that is because "This Rock" is a particularly fumbling play.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 19, 1943

New Play Stirs Class Problem

By BURTON RASCOE

THIS ROCK, by Walter Livingston Faust, which opened at the Longacre last night, is (to my mind) not only the dreariest, emptiest play of the season, a badly shopworn piece of theatrical shoddy, puerile in concept, dialogue and structure, but also, in the circumstances, downright offensive. From this play it would seem that the author wishes us to believe the present war is being fought simply in order that a surly, class-conscious, h-dropping mechanic from London's East End may improve his manners, learn to retain his aitches and marry a clothes-horse who lives in a 40-room house on a 1000-acre estate, and look down his nose at other uncouth evacuees from the London tenements. The author practically beseeches the audience to think how wonderful, wonderful, wonderful that is—what a blessing war is in furthering, so much, the spirit of democracy.

Lord knows, Mrs. Miniver, subtle and brilliantly executed as it was, both as a novel and as a movie, was repulsive enough in its subsurface snobbery, wherein you were invited to gurgle over how noble it was of those superior Minivers to be so nice to those quaint, shabby, uneducated people—so far beneath them in station; but in This Rock that sort of perverted sense of values is rendered grotesque and rather horrible by the author's pitiable lack of imagination and taste.

* * *

Twenty Children and a Myth

The play pretends to portray what happened when the Stanleys were called upon by the government to house 20 children evacuated to the countryside to escape the bombings of London. The children are a rowdy, ill-behaved, destructive lot when they first arrive, but in two years they have so endeared themselves to the Stanleys that the Stanleys are quite unwilling to part with any one of them. Moreover, they have, meantime, learned to speak properly, sing Christmas carols and behave like nice, upperclass children. Moreover, the young mechanic who was their escort to their new haven, has, after some scraps with the daughter of the manor over the differences between his class and hers, learned to speak well enough to pass as a "gentleman" and thus be admitted to the RAF and, of course, goes into a clinch with the gal at the final curtain. (Mr. Faust here perpetuates the myth that the RAF is open only to upper-class Englishmen.)

The author (and producer) emphasize the splendor of the lad's achievement by managing to get the beauteous Jane Sterling on and off the stage every five minutes or thereabouts for a change of costume, until her entrances and exits seem like those of a model at a style show. Each creation Miss Sterling wears, whether it is an evening gown or a Waac's uniform, is a stunnerino. Her walk, her manner, her unflexing, gracious and superior smile, and her voice, also, must have made some buyers in the audience come awake long enough to mistake the place and inquire the price of this or that number in gross lots.

* * *

A Sample of the Dialogue

A single instance will give you an idea of the mechanics and dialogue. Malcolm Dunn, an excellent actor, has to play the part of an ancient gardener whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather were gardeners to the Stanleys, and he has to deliver a silly monologue on the likeness of people to flowers, with some nonsense about hybrids. He has no other excuse in the play, so what are the first words spoken after he has left the stage? . . . Of course! You guessed it: "Dear old Angus! I don't know what we would do without him."

Billie Burke is one of my favorites of the stage. What she is called upon to do in this awful play she does superbly well; but the author seems vaguely to have heard that Miss Burke has been playing the part of a fluttery nitwit in the movies until it seems that unimaginative producers won't cast her for anything else, and so he has written a part for her along those general lines, only worse than usual. Nicholas Joy, Zachary Scott, Jane Sterling and Alastair Kyle are featured with Miss Burke in the billing; but I don't see that any of them did any more to distinguish themselves than any other members of the cast. But, God knows, they had little enough to work with. Even the children in this play (and there is a stage full of them) are given a raw deal by the author. They are not required to act like children or talk like children but to run screaming through the house from time to time and when called upon, individually, to speak, they are required to say things no kids in the world would say naturally.

Eddie Dowling has always seemed to me one of the most percipient, intelligent and knowing producers, one of the hopes of the American theater. He has risked money on things of worth even when he must have known they would not be commercial successes. How he happened to see anything but creaky claptrap in This Rock is a puzzle to me.

"This Rock"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 19, 1943

Dull Homecoming For Billie Burke

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AFTER a dozen years, it was nice to see Billie Burke back on Broadway last night, and to see her still looking young and pretty. But, for all that, the news today is anything but cheerful. *This Rock* is a well-intentioned little play which it would be foolish to deal with too harshly; but it is so inept and poorly written and badly contrived that one cannot even dismiss it with much grace.

Mr. Faust has written of some children who are evacuated from the London slums and brought to an upper-class country house in the North of England. They are brought there by a proud and bitter young Cockney with strong feelings about the upper classes. Naturally, the family that houses the children has a pretty young daughter; naturally, too, the young Cockney resents her in the first act, wonders about her in the second, and marries her in the third. If the romance is totally lacking in suspense, it is at least endowed with a certain significance—for Mr. Faust is pleading for a better understanding between rich and poor, and trying to show that democracy must be more than mere words in people's mouths.

* * *

Unhappily, however, the play has only its simple good intentions to recommend it; and even they are tinged with condescension and enveloped in pretty-prettiness. Mr. Faust has skirted the real issues to provide a story-book ending, and the whole play, as a matter of fact, never has anything more than a story-book quality. Nor is it any more engaging than it is real. Mr. Faust fills the stage with children, he showers the audience with cute talk, much the cutest of which falls from the lips of Miss Burke, who, as the fluttering and hen-brained—but essentially understanding—mother of the household, indulges in every kind of arch and silly flapdoodle. I'm afraid that all her natural charm can't keep what she has to do from seeming pretty dreadful.

When Mr. Faust isn't being cute, he is being preachy; but in neither capacity is he able to write with anything approaching competence, or to make his play move with anything resembling speed. As the young Cockney, Zachary Scott gives as good a performance as one could expect, and there are satisfactory ones by Jane Sterling, Nicholas Joy and young Alastair Kyle.

NEW YORK SUN
February 19, 1943

Billie Burke Appears in 'This Rock,' Presented at Longacre by Mr. Dowling

By WARD MOREHOUSE

BILLIE BURKE, who has graced the New York stage in the fables of Maugham, Pinero and Tarkington, returned to Broadway last night after an absence of twelve years. It would be a pleasure to report that her new comedy, "This Rock," is a good one. But it is not. It is mechanical and heavy-handed.

Walter Livingston Faust, whose business is oil, is the author of "This Rock." The usually astute Eddie Dowling, a stimulating influence in local theatricals for the past decade, brought Miss Burke back from the West and into the Longacre Theatre. Welcome she is, but the part with which she has been provided is skimpy indeed and seems to have been written into the play only recently, and built up here and there as they went along.

Mr. Faust had an idea, but hardly a play. I suspect that "This Rock" showed up to better advantage when given in its original form by resident players of Summit, N. J., than it did last evening in 48th street. Its better effects are probably those in which the stage is swarming with children, evacuated from London to escape the blitz. Undisciplined and unscrubbed brats they are, brought from London's East End and set down in the manor house and upon the thousand-acre estate of a wealthy shipbuilder on the River Tyne.

In his three frequently ponderous acts Mr. Faust shows the effects of the impact of the hoodlums from the city slums upon the upper-class Stanleys. He pictures the conflict between the forthright daughter of the household and the bitter and class-conscious young man who has shepherded the yowling evacuees into the country. It's Mr. Faust's belief that the war has swept away social barriers and it is certainly his hope that it will result in a better understanding between the classes.

The theater-wise Eddie Dowling has worked tirelessly in the staging of "This Rock." His desire to bring the too-long-absent Miss Burke back to the theater was commendable indeed, but the joint efforts of all concerned have not given her more than a sketchy role. Miss Burke looks well. She has all her old animation and charm. In the role of the flighty, harum-scarum Mrs. Stanley she tosses her head and claps her hands as in bygone years and gets the utmost from her material. But the play could really have gone along without the inclusion of the character of Mrs. Stanley at all.

Nicholas Joy, a skillful and believable actor, is quiet, wise, understanding in the part of the estate owner. Jane Sterling provides an attractive heroine. Of the children, Alastair Kyle has the most to do and goes about his job with zest and confidence. There will be lots of work in the theater for Master Kyle if Hollywood will leave him alone. The children have doubtless been carefully cast and they enjoy themselves tremendously.

It's good news for me to report that Billie Burke, who first came to us with John Drew and stayed for twenty years and more, is back where she belongs—in the Broadway theater. It would be better news if I could say she has a play worthy of her time.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 19, 1943

Billie Burke and Flock of Kids Romp Thru 'This Rock,' Comedy

"This Rock," comedy by Walter Livingston Faust. Produced by Eddie Dowling at the Longacre Theatre, New York, Feb. 18, 1943.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

IT IS a little hard to tell about Walter Livingston Faust's comedy, "This Rock," which got away to a lively start at the Longacre Theatre last night. It is a very sentimental and quite artificial comedy about a small herd of evacuated children from London's East End who are billeted with the shipbuilding Stanleys at their magnificent estate on the River Tyne.

Noble little children they are, for all they shout "Cripes!" and would say "Bloody!" if Mr. Faust and Mr. Dowling, their director, had not stopped their mouths with other and better words.

And the Mrs. Stanley who mothers them is none other than that likable comedienne, Billie Burke, who used to pile up her words and purse up her mouth and crinkle up her eyes for us years ago, before she went to Hollywood and began giving her all to the pictures.

The combination is not without its flashes of sentimental appeal. Which usually is the superficial appeal aimed at those who wax cheerful and tearful on fairy stories about children and geraniums.

Long, Long Ago

As many years ago as your grandmother wants to remember there was a very sentimental play about a little red-legged 10-year-old named Lord Fauntleroy who so captured the heart of his gouty old grandpa, the Earl, that he won a home and a fortune for himself and Dearest, his mama.

It ran for years and years, to the great delight of sentimentalists and the complete disgust of those who hated stagey children and all sentimental comedy.

In "This Rock" little Johnnie MacMasters with equal completeness wins the heart of Cecily Stanley and impels her to give over her home to the evacuees, and causes Johnnie's tough brother to change from an embittered airfield mechanic into a handsome and happy RAF flier.

So you can see that it is possible for "This Rock" also to run, if not for years and years, at least for days and days, because of Miss Burke and the many chances it gives sentimentalists to weave their own stories about the plight of London's blitz orphans.

Last night the dimout sirens furnished an echo for the stage proceedings that was at first disturbing, and later an added touch of atmosphere.

Could Learn

I am a little sorry that Mr. Faust did not have more professional help with his story than apparently he did have. His subject is a good one, and what he, as an American industrialist, wants to say in favor of the breaking down of class consciousness and the onsweep of the forces of democracy after the war is worth saying.

But he doesn't know all he should know about English character, or English children, or the limitations of stage effectiveness, or how to play with sentiment without making it seem a little foolish. As when he brings the gardener into the living room to transplant a geranium.

He shouldn't have dressed his children up in starched finery. Or set them singing "Silent Night" on Christmas eve. Or made too obvious the romance that ennobles his lovers. Or depend on potato-peeling comedy for Miss Burke. Or made her such a completely vacuous lady, just for the laughs of the simple-minded. His intentions are fine, but his technique is pretty crude.

Miss Burke looks marvelously well and seems very happy.

Nice performances by Nicholas Joy and Jane Sterling, with beauty and handsome gowns added in her case. Stalwart heroics by Zachary Scott and modest boy-comedy by talented Alastair Kyle, a refugee in his own right.

Anyway, a class-conscious audience had a good time last night.

"The Moon Vine"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
February 12, 1943

The Moon Vine Opens at the Morosco

By BURTON RASCOE

THE star of The Moon Vine, which opened at the Morosco last night, is not in the cast. It is Lucinda Ballard, who did the settings and the costumes. The porch and yard of the Meade home, the revival tent and the clothing of the cast were, in every pernickety detail, a triumph of realistic and satisfying stage art. Many a Southerner in New York would get homesick just looking at that set.

I earnestly wish that I could say that the play lives up to the settings and costumes; but, in spite of the torrential applause of friends of the cast in the audience (and perhaps others who were genuinely pleased) at the curtain calls after the show was over, I am afraid it is not a play I can recommend with any enthusiasm. The first act and most of the second drag so badly that quite a few people left, thereby depriving themselves of the pleasure of a third act which is genuinely entertaining and exciting. That third act is a veritable Charley's Aunt of misunderstandings and evasions lest the secret get out. I confess I didn't find it so excruciatingly funny, but many in the audience did; and their laughter was natural and cumulative, so much so that the dialogue was held up once and drowned out at other times.

* * *

Another Aspect of the South

In this play Jack Kirkland, the producer, is apparently trying to atone for certain misconceptions some Northerners have derived about the South from his fabulously successful Tobacco Road. Here he seems to say: "The lewd, lascivious and no account Lesters, whose wormy diversions entertained you for so long, while true enough to certain remote regions of the Georgia hinterlands, represent only a minute and trifling aspect of Southern life. Indeed the Lesters are not peculiar to the South. For, did not the notorious Jukes family, so dear to the eugenists because of their generations of inbreeding and incest that (apparently) made them unique, as a family, in the annals of vice and crime—did not these Jukeses live upstate within a hundred miles of New York City?. . . . The South is various, with as many kinds and qualities of people as you will find in the North or anywhere, some of them as peculiar, perhaps, in their local prides, traditions, conventions and provincialisms as you will find in Greenwich Village or Park Ave. . . . I present you a Louisiana town at the turn of the century and a nice but hidebound and ingrown family therein from which a spirited girl is trying desperately to escape."

Everything about this play by Patricia Coleman is true and natural. It has every bit as much psychological depth and realistic differentiations of character as have Chekhov's The Cherry Orchard or The Three Sisters. It is symbolic, too, of the awakening of the South that began to take place around 1900, which resulted in a degree of the emancipation of Southern women from the shackles of the code of chivalry and in the breakdown of provincial and middle-class conventions that was perceptible elsewhere as well as in the South. Tarkington has depicted this transvaluation of values in notable, if slightly sentimentalized novels; and the Meades of Mansfield, La., are essentially very like the Ambersons of Indiana. The only trouble is that I, for one, couldn't get interested in the comic mess Mariah Meade (played by Haila Stoddard) as a stage-struck girl had created for herself. I think this was partially the fault of Miss Stoddard, who frequently overplayed the part and shone, actually, in only one scene in the last act.

* * *

About a Stage-Struck Girl

The story is that of a suppressed and high-spirited girl, who is so stage-struck that, in order to free herself from the young missionary whom her family has got her engaged to, she invents a story that he and his whole pastorate have been wiped out by a plague and gets her best friend to forge a letter from Australia to that effect. She plans to run away and go on the stage. Meanwhile, she discovers that her girl friend's brother is not the traveling salesman he has allowed the town to believe he is—because of his father's position there as a minister—but a stock company actor, home because his company was stranded.

The boy falls in love with her at first sight and wants to marry and run away with her as his partner in a song and dance act; but she, who is accustomed to go the whole hog in her make-believe about everything, plays the part of the pious, bereaved and inconsolable fiancee so realistically that he gets religion and decides to abandon the stage and become a missionary for her sake—which is just what she doesn't want, but can't say so, because she has got herself involved in such a lie that she feels she can't confess without destroying the boy's idea of her. A wise former resident of the town, now the district attorney living in New Orleans, who has always understood the girl, acts as the sympathetic unraveler of her cocoon of Southern social shams and conventions.

There is a revival scene that is naturalistic, in which A. Winfield Hoeny is quite marvelous as the sweating, opportunistic and hypocritical exhorter. As I see them, the other honors of the evening go to Mary Lou Taylor, as the heroine girl friend, to Philip Bourneuf as the district attorney; to Agnes Scott Yost as the forgetful grandma with a passion for hiding things; and to Arthur Franz as the young trouper who has had none of the small-town edges knocked off him. Of these, Miss Taylor in a small part was exceptionally good.

But the play is static and so is much of the acting.

NEW YORK SUN
February 12, 1943

'The Moon Vine,' Deep South Comedy by Patricia Coleman, at the Morosco

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE languor of Louisiana in the early century, with moon vines creeping over chipped and weather-beaten cornices and the sun slanting through the lacy trees; elderly ladies rocking decorously on the front veranda; organ music, fireflies, palmetto fans and life in slow motion—such is the background and locale of "The Moon Vine" by Patricia Coleman.

This is Miss Coleman's first play to reach Broadway. It is a scattered piece, and straggling, but it has genuine nostalgia, authentic charm and many amusing moments. Last evening's audience, gathered for the premiere in the house that Oliver Morosco built, seemed to love it.

Jack Kirkland has brought this Deep South comedy into 45th street. Haila Stoddard plays its spirited and mutinous heroine, and the experienced John Cromwell has staged it painstakingly, squeezing the utmost from the script.

Miss Coleman takes us back to the comparatively untroubled year of 1905. There was a Roosevelt in the White House and there were Aunt Lullahs and Uncle Yanceys and Brother Walts in the droway town of Mansfield, La. Miss Coleman writes of a stagestruck girl in the moonvine country who falls in love with a home-town boy who had gone his way as a barnstorming actor, who had been on the fringes of the world of Warfield and Maude Adams and Mrs. Leslie Carter, and who had picked up something of the soft-tap routine of George Primrose. The prodigal Danny becomes involved in a brawl in a New Orleans house of sin, but he feigns religion to win his Mariah and plays his big repentance scene at a revival meeting. But it's the actor in him Mariah wanted and the actor she gets, and off they go together on the long trail to fame and fortune, via the stage.

The atmospheric touches in "The Moon Vine" are frequently superior to the writing in the play. There are times when there is more atmosphere than play. There is some warming comedy provided by the queasy old ladies on the porch; some downright funny stuff here and there, particularly in the revival tent scene. Several of the town characters seemed to have stepped from beneath the moss-hung live oaks of towns I have long known well. "The Moon Vine," then, is something of an improvement on recent first-night fare. It has a chance of a Broadway run.

Mr. Cromwell, who has given valiant service to the New York theater for three decades, sometimes as a director, other times as an actor—"Too Many Cooks," "Lucky Sam McCarver" and, I hasten to add, "Gentlemen of the Press"—has heightened the values that lie in the script. Haila Stoddard gives her best performance to date as Mariah. Arthur Franz is excellent as the wandering Danny and so are such players as Philip Bourneuf, Agnes Scott Yost, Will Geer and Mary Lou Taylor. I could have stood much more of the Louisiana Negro brought from his native parish to play the character of Drop Dead.

And now, after seeing Patricia Coleman's play, I finally know what has become of my Cousin Eula-May, who vanished mysteriously from the town of Guyton, Ga., in the long ago. She's right there in her rocker on that moon-vined veranda at the Morosco, as testy as ever, forgetful as always, and drawn to the life.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
February 12, 1943

'Moon Vine' Is No Morning Glory

By MARK SCHUBART

STRIPPED of its trappings, *The Moon Vine* would be a deadly play. But decked out as it is with a few tart comedy situations, some sprightly dialogue, and several diverting characters, it manages to provide a sporadically amusing evening. To enjoy its moments, however, you have to close your eyes to scenes of awkward and out-of-place melodrama, of superfluous plot complications, and of cloying sentiment.

In what it sets out to tell, the play is innocent enough. Miss Coleman writes about a painfully conventional and proper Louisiana family shortly after the turn of the century. The daughter of the family, who wants to be an actress (horrors!), meets and falls in love with a young actor. Starting off with that, Miss Coleman provides innumerable complications, many of which you can forecast as the play progresses.

Miss Coleman has burdened this lightweight plot with a lot of serious counterplot which, inevitably, bogs it down and undermines its essentially comedy nature. Bits of mischievous humor are sandwiched with stretches of serious philosophizing, and purple melodrama rubs elbows with what, in contrast, seems like burlesque. Thus there is a revival meeting at which the preacher, a dead ringer for Zero Mostel, manages to inspire a seriously drawn young sinner to repent. Any right-thinking sinner in a similar situation would have hastened down the road to perdition.

What makes the play palatable is Miss Coleman's characterization of some eccentric old Southern ladies and her occasionally witty dialogue. Too, she has recreated the era of which she writes convincingly enough. But these attributes do not provide hearty enough fare for a full evening's entertainment.

In general, the cast does all it can to make the play move, with Agnes Scott Yost having a field day in the luscious part of the scatterbrained Mrs. Sylvaine. As the young would-be actress, Haila Stoddard is charmingly arch and Arthur Franz acquits himself gracefully in the difficult straight role of the young actor. Mr. Cromwell's staging is forceful and energetic and Lucinda Ballard's sets and costumes are one of the play's few unadulterated joys.

"The Moon Vine"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
February 12, 1943

Deep South

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE is a faint edge of satire in "The Moon Vine," which Jack Kirkland presented at the Morosco last night. The fact remains that this new Patricia Coleman play needs far more than a bit of comic extravagance to make its dramatic points. At this late date, the antics of a Southern belle, whether in period costume or not, need considerable manipulation on the stage. Despite the efforts of a competent company, the latest theatrical offering tosses a boomerang in the way of beguiling humor.

* * *

For Miss Coleman has examined the vagaries of a deep South ingenue in 1905 with a minimum of originality. Her heroine swoons and lies, drives dull fellows crazy and upsets her whole family without even getting the obvious dramatic power that resided in "Gone With the Wind." If the play were only an out-and-out travesty it would be far more effective than it now stands. As it is, one is apt to wonder whether one is in the heart of Louisiana or in Hoboken, with a gas-lit revival.

* * *

To be fair to the author, she knows how to write some rather sharp dialogue on occasion. When she recreates a revival meeting, at which a preacher's son delivers himself of a public confession of misdeeds and amorous longings, the show takes on considerable burlesque gayety. When she is characterizing the various figures of her little comedy she has a knack of turning the right phrase and putting dialogue in a reasonably dramatic counterpoint. Construction has her baffled, and so does mood. "The Moon Vine" falls apart in every scene, and your guess is as good as mine as to what mood it attempts to establish.

* * *

The players plod faithfully through their assignments, even when the script and the John Cromwell direction give them scant help. Haila Stoddard plays the 1905 Louisiana come-hither girl with proper affectation, although she is guilty of some florid gestures in the final scene, which finds her united with her lover and about to embark on a stage career. Arthur Franz plays the hero straight, which means that the character is too frequently exaggerated. Will Geer, Agnes Scott Yost, Vera Allen, Mary Lou Taylor and the others do their best to reconstruct a funny Southern background. As I have already intimated, a little of this goes a long way, today.

'THE MOON VINE'

Play in three acts by Patricia Coleman. Staging by John Cromwell; settings and costumes by Lucinda Ballard. Presented at the Morosco Theater Thursday evening, February 11, 1943, by Jack Kirkland. The cast:

Mrs. Meade (Miss Eloise) ..... Vera Allen
Strother Meade ..... Grace Coppin
Miss Lucy Telfair (Aunt Lulah) ..... Kate McComb
Mrs. Sylvaine (Miss Bessie) ..... Agnes Scott Yost
Larkin ..... Robert W. Albury
Drop Dead ..... Drop Dead
Miss Francie Taylor ..... Phyllis Tyler
Uncle Yancey Sylvaine ..... Will Geer
Zack Meade ..... Richard Tyler
Mattie ..... Ruth Anderson
Ovid Carter ..... Philip Bourneuf
Mariah Meade ..... Haila Stoddard
Ellen Hatfield ..... Mary Lou Taylor
Danny Hatfield ..... Arthur Franz
Porter ..... Donald Murphy
Fane ..... Michael Road
Andre ..... Youl Bryner
Brother Walt Littlejohn ..... A. Winfield Hoeny
Rev. Dr. Randolph Hatfield ..... John McKee
Nic ..... Biddy Fleet
Pic ..... Elmer Snowden

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
February 12, 1943

Jack Kirkland Presents Comedy of Louisiana By Patricia Coleman

By JOHN ANDERSON

ALTHOUGH the members of the Cajun family, which recently occupied the Morosco, have picked up their great big doorstep and departed, the Morosco itself remains faithful to the empire of the late unlamented Kingfish, and last night Jack Kirkland presented there a comedy called "The Moon Vine" by Patricia Coleman.

The locale has shifted from the banks of Old Man River to the northwest corner of Louisiana; the characters have moved up considerably in the social scale, but the dramatic interest isn't yet all that it should be. Maybe the Morosco ought to try another state for a change, if only a state of mind.

There are some pleasant passages in "The Moon Vine," especially in the latter half of it, but they are hardly enough to sit around half the evening waiting for. When they arrive, they present a welcome relief from the chatty tedium of the first part, and suggest that Miss Coleman had something in mind besides creating the sweet Confederate atmospheres of a small Southern town in the Year of Our Lord 1905.

Falls for Slicker

What she had in mind was to show us a flighty coquette, who was so stagestruck, that she almost acted herself out of a sweetheart.

Though engaged to a pious missionary in Australia, Mariah fell suddenly and hopelessly in love with the first young actor she met, a debonair youth who got himself into trouble in New Orleans by acting Romeo, not in a theatre but in a local brothel, of all places, with a literate prostitute who happened to know all Juliet's answers.

It seemed that her special friend didn't like it, and disregarded the fact that, after all, it was Shakespeare.

Fresh from this peculiar escapade Danny Hatfield crossed the path of Miss Mariah and she promptly notified her family that her reverend fiance had been eaten by kangaroos, or died of the fever, or something, together with his whole family.

Thereupon she robed herself in black, and let out such noble laments over this fictitious death, that the young Danny decided to reform and become a missionary himself in order to wed her.

But being a true child of the theatre, she is like the moon vine and blooms only at night, so at the end the sex-tossed lovers are to be seen eloping, not to the Antipodes, but to a stock company in Cincinnati.

Once you are caught up in the tale, it has a certain gaiety and light romantic interest, and there is even a faintly serious note (struck somewhat insistently by an alert young lawyer, who also loves Miss Mariah) about the people of the South facing reality.

There is an amusing scene of a revival meeting, with a sharply drawn sketch of a hypocritical soul-heaver, and some touches of the town's carefully quaint characters, including a wonderfully inarticulate Negro named Drop Dead, played by an actor who, by the year's oddest coincidence, seems to be named Drop Dead. In the shortest audible roll on Broadway, Mr. Dead, I may say, is perfect.

The trouble with all this is the trouble with so many plays about the South. In trying to show that the characters have nothing to do, the author lets them do nothing, except create over-time atmosphere.

The audience might as well be asked to stand in the lobby, tapping its foot until 9:40 o'clock, to get the leisure over with.

Blooms Too Late

I'm afraid that for all its engaging moments, "The Moon Vine" sticks to its title literally, and blooms very late in the evening. It never quite recovers from its initial ennui. Nor is the quality of the writing all that it should be.

Mr. Kirkland has given it a generous production, swarming with characters, shrubbery, vines, and (I almost thought in the literalness of Lucinda Ballard's setting) mosquitoes.

As the coquettish Mariah, flirting with love, life, and the drama, Haila Stoddard gets the surface amusement out of a flighty character about which the author seems none too sure in her own mind. There is the bite of ridicule in the portrait, as well as in Miss Stoddard's gaily pitched performance, but it is a little too unstable to stay in focus.

Under John Cromwell's direction, there are other excellent performers in Miss Coleman's quaint picture gallery, especially those done by Will Geer, Vera Allen, Kate McComb and Agnes Scott Yost.

Philip Bourneuf is admirable as the lawyer in love with Mariah, and Arthur Franz as the successful suitor. The portrait of a rabble-rousing revivalist is not only well and shrewdly written, but it is superbly played by A. Winfield Hoeny, in a snapshot that is uncanny in its veracity and effect.

It's a pity that with so much in her favor, Miss Coleman hasn't quite proved her talent as a playwright. But I'm willing to wager heavy odds that the talent is there—and that it will be heard from.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 12, 1943

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Moon Vine"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IT WOULD be a far happier world could the report this morning note that "The Moon Vine" is as good as its best intentions. For in her first play to reach town, Patricia Coleman has found an idea that is away from the ordinary, well-trodden track of Broadway comedy, and a number of agreeable players do their best to make it engaging. Unfortunately as a whole it does not quite live up to its expectations, and as it went on last evening at the Morosco Theatre it seemed to be one of those unhappy dramas that needed only a final push that it never received.

* * *

Possibly the difficulty lies in the matter of atmosphere, a quality that a period comedy must have but which it also can have to excess. There are too many leaves on the trees, too many blossoms on the moon vine growing along the porch, too many characters—and not enough action. As a playwright, Miss Coleman keeps promising that something soon is to happen, but she never brings it about, leaving her characters sitting chatting on a Louisiana porch and the atmosphere to smother a delicate and fragile little story.

* * *

The time is 1905 and the heroine a young girl who has become engaged to a missionary who has gone to Australia. Like all worthy Louisiana belles—of the period—she has a hankering for the ungodly stage and no hankering for her fiancé. One of the neighbor's sons, an actor, comes home and the inevitable happens. The fact that he has been a witness to a murder in a New Orleans house of little repute, and must go to court to testify, complicates the smooth course of courtship, but at the end the couple sets forth on a career that it hopes will end in Mr. Frohman's company.

* * *

Haila Stoddard, very pretty and quite obviously a Louisiana belle, plays the role of the girl who cannot make up her mind between religious resignation or solid trouping, and for the most part she does it with a dainty and charming air. Arthur Franz is the boy next door, making the role a little unsophisticated perhaps in view of what he had been doing in New Orleans. Will Geer, the perennial Jeeter Lester, appears in a clean shirt and familiar drawl as the amiable elder statesman of the household, and there are two good portraits of maiden aunts by Kate McComb and Agnes Scott Yost. John Cromwell directed and Lucinda Ballard designed the costumes and two settings—a porch surrounded by lush foliage and a revival meeting tent.

"The Moon Vine"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 12, 1943

'Moon Vine' Simple Comedy About Willful Southern Girl

"The Moon Vine," comedy by Patricia Coleman. Produced by Jack Kirkland at the Morosco Theatre, New York, Feb. 9, 1943.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

"THE MOON VINE," opening at the Morosco Theatre last night, is such a comedy as a man might choose for his wife, if his wife were as pretty and competent an actress as Haila Stoddard happens to be. And I suspect that is what happened.

Miss Stoddard is also Mrs. Jack Kirkland, and Mr. Kirkland is the young producer who made his name and his fortune with eight years of "Tobacco Road." So you see everything fits.

Otherwise "The Moon Vine," written by Patricia Coleman, is a wispy little short story sort of comedy that isn't strong enough to start even a mild fever nor weak enough to excite either sympathy or resentment.

It may be Miss Coleman's first produced play. It is, so far as the Mantle records go. It tells of a willful young lady born in the eighteen nineties and brought up in Louisiana through the early nineteen hundreds.

Ambitious Lady

Mariah Meade is her name and she had always wanted to be an actress, even after she became engaged to a missionary, just to please her playwright creator and help the plot.

When one of the town boys comes home from a vaudeville tour and she falls in love with him she promptly kills off her missionary in a letter that buries him in the jungles of Australia.

But just as she is ready to confess her love for the trouper he is grabbed as a state's witness to a murder in a New Orleans fancy house. Which leads for some reason to his confession of sin at a village revival.

Which leads by other devious ways to her own confession of the letter hoax and gets everything straightened out by closing time, without bothering anybody.

Doing Their Bits

Miss Stoddard's sweetly adolescent moods become her as prettily as the clothes Lucinda Ballard has designed for her, and that's all either her author or her director, John Cromwell, demands of her.

Arthur Franz is the trouper, contributing a soft shoe dance in place of the trombone solo advertised in the Sunday picture press.

Nice group of old ladies, Yankee rather than Southern, by Grace Coppin, Agnes Scott Yost, Vera Allen and Kate McComb.

Mary Lou Taylor, Philip Bourneuf, A. Winfield Hoeny and John McKee fill in acceptably, and the Louisiana exterior setting, also by Miss Ballard, is attractive.

Paramount is interested and probably will get its money back if nothing happens to the double feature schedules.

NEW YORK POST
February 12, 1943

Haila Stoddard as a Stage-Struck Southern Belle In 'The Moon Vine'

By WILELLA WALDORF

LAUGHTER is not too plentiful in the theatre these days, and "The Moon Vine" manages to stir up some welcome mirth at the Morosco by recalling, and blithely exaggerating, the taboos and conventions of a small Southern town in 1905.

"The Moon Vine" is a synthetic comedy that never seems even faintly real, but some of its caricature is amusing. After a rather uneventful first act, it erupts into pure farce in a second act revival scene, and tapers off romantically with the elopement of two stage-struck youngsters to join a Cincinnati stock company.

It is easy to understand why Haila Stoddard wanted to play the role of eighteen-year-old Mariah Meade, a daughter of the old South with modern notions, and why her husband, Jack Kirkland, produced the comedy for her.

The Belle of Mansfield, La.

Mariah is a devastating college freshman with a passion for the theatre. Always acting one part or another, she is thrilled by the return of a neighboring prodigal son who ran away years before to go on the stage. Stranded nearby with a "Ten Nights in a Bar-room" troupe, the youth pretends that he has been working as a shoe salesman, to save his family embarrassment. Mention of the word "actor" in Mansfield, La., in the year 1905 caused strong men to blush and well-brought-up indies to swoon.

The youth in turn is fatally smitten to the extent of confessing his sins (he had visited the local fancy-house and witnessed a murder on his way home) during Brother Littlejohn's revival meeting, and the situation is somewhat complicated by the fact that Mariah, tiring of her fiance, a missionary in Australia, pretends that he has died of plague in the Bush country.

This gives her a chance to moon about in deep mourning imitating the leading tragediennes of the time. She is, however, able to cast off her doleful mood when the serenaders arrive long enough to go into a dance to the accompaniment provided by Negro minstrels.

A Dance Interlude

Miss Stoddard is no eighteen-year-old, but she's a good comedienne and some of her Gibson-girl histrionics are very amusing. Arthur Franz is ingratiating as the boy who comes in off the road for a spell and his soft-shoe stepping provides a snappy musical comedy interlude. Miss Stoddard herself dances with grace and abandon.

The rest of the company is required merely to provide a suitable background for Mariah and her goings-on, and most of them are as synthetic as the play and the artificial moon vine that blossoms on Lucinda Ballard's old Southern mansion porch.

A. Winfield Hoeny booms an effective take-off on an old-time revival preacher. Philip Bourneuf does what he can as the local district attorney (just another of the boys who's in love with the fascinating Mariah), and Grace Coppin gives a refreshingly believable portrait as the elder sister, with Vera Allen fluttering around from time to time in a thankless mother role.

The others failed to register much one way or another, and we thought Agnes Scott Yost might have made much more of the absent-minded grandmother than she did. It's one of the better parts Miss Coleman has written, with some funny lines and business that ought to come over more forcefully than they do.

John Cromwell, the director, seems to have changed his mind several times in the course of rehearsals as to precisely what sort of play "The Moon Vine" ought to be. Now and then it achieves the nostalgic quality of a "One Sunday Afternoon," but for the most part it relies on a purely farcical approach to the dear old days of 1905 for easy laughs. Some of the effects are overworked, but it does provide a generally amusing evening.

"For Your Pleasure"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
February 6, 1943

'For Your Pleasure' At the Mansfield

By G. E. BLACKFORD

WHISK "For Your Pleasure," musical-singing-and-dancing concoction featuring Veloz and Yolanda, over to the very smart atmosphere of the Rainbow Room and you would have one of that famous spot's most talked of presentations.

Or transfer it, suitably compressed, into the confines of Mr. Lou Walters' very gay Latin Quarter, spotlight it against the kaleidoscopic background of his charming and snappy revue and that mecca of evening entertainment seekers would have to dispense with fewer, bar and kitchen to make room for the extra tables that would be requested nightly.

But on the stage of the Mansfield Theatre, where it made its metropolitan debut last night, "For Your Pleasure," in the aggregate, just doesn't click. It's a case of too much sugar and not enough spice, too much of art and no slapstick for leavening.

• • •

Artists Charming

Paradoxically enough, no single item in the bill can be held open to criticism.

Veloz and Yolanda are as charming in their dance presentations as you could wish. The personable Veloz and the lovely Yolanda retain all the personability and loveliness that carried them to the top of the ballroom dancing lists. They dance beautifully, even if last night they danced a few too many times.

Vivacious Susan Miller of the radio, vaudeville and nightclubs—and late of George Abbott's "Beat the Band"—is a delight to see, pleasing to hear and a grand little show-woman to boot. She helped a lot, even stopped the show, in a manner of speaking.

The Golden Gate Quartet is probably the finest combination of its type in the country. These four Negro boys can sing them hot and sweet, or slow and dreamy, to your taste. They helped mightily to enliven the proceedings, too.

Young Bill Gary—he's 22—is a most talented ballet tap dancer. He'll go places, unquestionably. He's already gone a long way from his native Chicago.

Vicente Gomez does all sorts of things to a guitar. Jerry Shelton is a wizard with an accordion. Al and Lee Reiser are a swell two-piano team—their long-time radio popularity attests to that.

• • •

Color Missing

They're all marvelous, by themselves, in short takes. But put them all together, stretch the whole thing out a bit too much as they have done in "For Your Pleasure," present the combination against a virtually blank stage and the ingredients just don't mix properly.

It's a cocktail with something missing. What's missing is the mixer—the atmosphere, the plush and glitter and the background color that all feature acts need. That and something for contrast, maybe a few acrobats and a sliding Billy Watson or two.

"For Your Pleasure" was supposed to present something new in entertainment. It doesn't. It just gives you too much of the best for its own good. Even the finest steak (does anyone know where to find a good one these days) needs a bit of mustard sauce, or a bit of Bernaise or Worcestershire or even the lowly catsup to properly bring out its flavor.

• • •

P. S.—The gowns that Katherine Kuhn has designed for Miss Yolanda to wear in "For Your Pleasure" are gorgeous. And the one she made for Miss Miller's single appearance (they could have afforded to let that girl have another place on the bill) is stunning, too.

"For Your Pleasure"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
February 6, 1943

'For Your Pleasure' Veloz and Yolanda And Several Others

"For Your Pleasure," a dance vaudeville assembled by George M. Gatts at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Feb. 5, 1943.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

AND so it came to pass that Frank Veloz and Yolanda Casazza decided to organize their own dance revue and come right out with it on Broadway. Why shouldn't they? Haven't they had a happy and successful career as Veloz and Yolanda, dancers?

Haven't they acquired a home on Long Island, three or four race horses, a baby boy named Nicky and a reputation that has taken them through show business from dancing contests to a Shubert revue, and from a Chinese restaurant to Carnegie Hall? Why, they asked, shouldn't they have their own show? There being no convincing answer and nothing standing in the way except the initial cost, they managed to scrape that together, and here they are at the Mansfield Theatre offering an entertainment called (and organized) "For Your Pleasure."

There is singing in it. First by the Golden Gate Quartet and then by Susan Miller. There is a guitar soloist, Vicente Gomez; an accordion soloist, Jerry Shelton, and a piano duo, Al and Lee Reiser.

And I may tell you they are all good. Otherwise Veloz and Yolanda wouldn't have asked them in. Being out of the top drawer themselves, they would not have enjoyed working with cheap acts.

No Comics

That probably is why they did not include even one comic. No gag comedians for them. No knock-abouts. No fan dancers. Just a few nice folk with talent and an agreeable stage presence.

Naturally the evening is given over mostly to dancing. The stars contribute thirteen numbers in all, ranging from the "Moonlight Madonna," and the "Darktown Strutters' Ball," through the Cuban "Son" (which, Mr. Veloz explained, is a sort of refined rhumba), and a version of "The Blue Danube" such as no Viennese ever danced, to the "Samba" and the "Tango Yolanda."

They are gifted, graceful, and good looking. As to the authenticity of their art, or their precise position among the many dancing couples who have acquired top billing in dance circles, I wouldn't know about such things.

I may say that they are pleasing performers to me. Mr. Veloz handles Miss Yolanda quite as carelessly and produces quite as startling whirlwind effects as any of his contemporaries.

And Miss Yolanda, her sleek raven tresses properly smoothed to the contour of her shapely head, follows affectionately as well as rhythmically where her husband leads.

Good Support

Senor Gomez is the best guitarist I happened to have heard. He can make anything from a tap dancer to a regiment of soldiers (well, a platoon, then) march out of his guitar, headed by a military band. Or he can play you a Flamenco lullaby that will almost put you to sleep.

The Golden Gate Quartet are finely blended voices. They sing spirituals like "I'm Listenin', Lord," a "Timber" number and a timely comic, "Stalin Wasn't Stallin'."

Susan Miller is the young woman who was picked out of vaudeville for the prima donna role in "Beat the Band," and if producers are wise she will be picked again. She sings too loud with the microphone, but she is wise in the ways of prima donni and young enough to improve with every engagement.

Bill Gary is a young dancer from Chicago of whom I'm sure Paul Draper would approve, and Jerry Shelton and the Reiser boys are good musicians.

Of course dance revues are only for those who like dancing. Hence the proceed-with-caution rating.

'FOR YOUR PLEASURE'

A variety revue, staged by Frank Veloz; presented at the Mansfield Theater on February 5, 1943, by George M. Gatts. In the cast are Veloz and Yolanda, Susan Miller, the Golden Gate Quartet, Jerry Shelton, Bill Gary, Al and Lee Reiser and Vicente Gomez.

NEW YORK POST
February 6, 1943

Veloz and Yolanda in a New Variety Show, "For Your Pleasure"

By WILELLA WALDORF

VELOZ AND YOLANDA, the ballroom dancers, had the audacity to present at the Mansfield Theatre last night a variety revue without a single dog act or comedian. Originally labeled "Dansation," it opened under a new title, "For Your Pleasure." Chiefly a dance show, interspersed with some expert guitar and accordion playing and a dash of hot rhythm by a Negro quartet, it is a generally pleasant Broadway novelty.

The wise boys who talk about "showmanship" and "selling an audience" are probably shaking their heads over this one. Not only does it dispense with comedians and ignore animal acts entirely—there isn't even a master of ceremonies. Frank Veloz himself makes a few remarks now and then, explaining some of the dance numbers but not once does he come out with a cigar and cane and stroll up and down recalling old jokes from the Follies of 1902.

"For Your Pleasure," in fact, is so engagingly naive that it doesn't even resurrect any of the burlesque skits about the fellow who called on a lady and was obliged to hide under the bed when her husband came home unexpectedly.

It may seem from this negative catalogue of virtues that we enjoyed "For Your Pleasure" more for what it doesn't have than for what it has, and in a way that is correct.

"The Lunts of the Dancing World"

There are, however, some definite assets. Veloz and Yolanda themselves are charming and talented dancers, as anyone who used to watch them a few years ago is sure to remember. Not only do they perform the customary ballroom numbers, with a sprinkling of foreign folk dances, and the inevitable "Blue Danube Waltz," they also exhibit a sense of humor in several novelties apparently invented by Mr. Veloz for the occasion.

Their press agent refers to them as "the Lunts of the dancing world, a happily married pair who love circuses, vaudeville and the theatre in general." Now and then they go in for a brief love scene in the course of some of their more romantic twirling and this invariably elicits sighs of ecstacy from the audience, which also enjoys such simple pastimes as clap-clapping in unison during a Mexican number when the dancers give the signal.

Vicente Gomez is a wizard on the guitar, which he plays huddled over a low microphone that proceeds to spit out the sound from an amplifier somewhat aloft and to the left. Jerry Shelton, who conducts, also does wondrous stunts on his accordion, while Al and Lee Reiser operate energetically on a couple of pianos in the pit.

The Golden Gate Quartet

Bill Gary, a young tap dancer who is apparently a protege of Veloz and Yolanda, offers several well-done numbers in the Paul Draper manner, but the biggest hand of the evening, next to that given Veloz and Yolanda themselves, went to the Negro rhythm boys known as the Golden Gate Quartet. Using a microphone, they do several typical Negro numbers in the inimitable Negro way, and wind up with an original ditty designed as a tribute to the Red Army, "Stalin Wasn't Stallin'."

Susan Miller was a promising newcomer in George Abbott's recent musical comedy, "Beat the Band," but last night she made the mistake of singing through a microphone.

The results were distressing. "When the breeze on high sang a lullaby" sounded less like a lullaby than a steamboat whistle, and when Miss Miller came out full voice, she reminded us of a mechanical train announcer. Since she got along well enough in "Beat the Band" without a microphone, there seems to be no good reason why she should have one in "For Your Pleasure." Let us hope she dispenses with it from now on, or at least tones down the amplifier.

Miss Miller's songs were familiar for the most part, including an "arrangement" of Gershwin's "Summer Time" that turned it unexpectedly into a contralto solo with boop-boop-a-doop trimmings. It was announced as one of the most beautiful songs Gershwin ever wrote. Not that way it isn't.

NEW YORK TIMES
February 6, 1943

Variety Minus

By LEWIS NICHOLS

WITHOUT doubt all the artists connected with "For Your Pleasure" are impeccable, and probably it is sheer boorishness to suggest they do not, as a collective unit, belong on Broadway. But the disagreeable fact remains that the variety show put together by Veloz and Yolanda is not a good one, for it lacks the change in pace a vaudeville bill should have and, above all, it lacks a bit of comedy. "For Your Pleasure" consists of ballroom dancing and tap dancing, guitar, accordion and piano playing, and a quartet and a singer of popular songs. Any three units would make the perfect night club show, but as stretched out for two hours at the Mansfield it is simply more, too much more, of the same.

As the stars of the bill, Veloz and Yolanda do most of the work, giving examples from all chapters of their repertoire—Mexican and Spanish dances, waltzes, little parodies. They are on the stage five times, which for variety's sake is undoubtedly too many times, expert as they are. The other dancer is Bill Gary, a good tap dancer when he keeps it simple, and less fortunate otherwise. Vicente Gomez can make a guitar sing with little effort, and Al and Lee Reiser are excellent at two pianos—straight and boogie-woogie. The singers are Susan Miller, the young lady who earlier this season was in "Beat the Band" and now is offering "Summertime," "Brazil" and the like; and the Golden Gate Quartet, which sings mainly Negro spirituals, including one it gleefully made up in honor of Hitler's current withdrawal from Russia.

Very likely what the bill most needs is the presence of Ed Wynn to amble on the stage and tear everything apart. "For Your Pleasure" is too gracious; variety should not be permitted to get soft.